

# Health Alert

August 9, 2002

**FROM: RONALD W. CATES  
INTERIM DIRECTOR**

**SUBJECT: WEST NILE VIRUS —GUIDANCE FOR AGENCIES  
HANDLING PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS**

The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) is providing the following guidance related to West Nile Virus including testing, handling, and disposing of dead birds, testing horses and humans, personal protection, and mosquito control. Please contact DHSS if you have any questions at 1-800-392-0272.

## Testing Dead Birds

Persons who find a dead bird and are concerned it could have had West Nile virus (WNV) should note where the bird is and contact their local public health agency for consultation and possible investigation. Local public health agencies (LPHAs) will determine the need to test the birds and ship the specimen to be tested if testing is warranted. (Note: Only blue jays, crows and birds of prey are being tested.)

Dead birds found in counties that already have reported WNV-positive birds are **not** targeted for further testing since the surveillance function will have already identified the presence of the WNV in the county (a current list of those counties can be found on DHSS's WNV web page <http://www.dhss.state.mo.us/WestNileVirus/index.html>). Because cases of dead birds are still being logged for data tracking, and because dead birds could indicate other potential public health concerns, people should still call their local public health agencies to report the dead birds and to receive consultation for further action.

## Handling and Disposing of Dead Birds

If the local public health agency advises, the bird should be picked up with a shovel, rake or with gloved hands and safely discarded. The carcass can be burned or buried (follow local ordinances). To dispose of the bird in the trash, place one garbage bag inside another garbage bag and place the dead bird inside the double bags. Never handle dead birds (and other dead animals) without gloves. If you do not have gloves, place the plastic bag over your hand and pick the bird up. More information on how to safely dispose of dead birds and other animals may be obtained from the local public health agency.

## West Nile Virus Testing for Horses

Questions/concerns about having horses tested for West Nile virus should be directed to your veterinarian or a local practicing veterinarian for consultation and testing. The veterinarian should take the blood sample and work directly with the Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory at the University of Missouri Columbia for analysis and diagnosis. For more information about the University's veterinary lab the phone number is 800-862-8635.

## West Nile Testing for Humans

Testing for West Nile virus in humans, when recommended by the physician, is available through the Missouri State Public Health Laboratory. Your physician will need to contact the State Public Health Laboratory for testing procedures (Phone number: 573-751-3334). Health Alert # 32 is available to physicians to provide guidance on testing.

## How to contact us:

Office of the Director  
912 Wildwood  
P.O. Box 570

Jefferson City, MO 65102  
Telephone: (800) 392-0272

Fax: (573) 751-6041

Website: [www.dhss.state.mo.us](http://www.dhss.state.mo.us)

It is important to remember that very few persons are actually at-risk for contracting West Nile virus in Missouri at this time. Transmission of WNV occurs when people become infected by the bite of a mosquito infected with West Nile virus. Even in areas where the virus is circulating, very few mosquitoes are infected with the virus and the chances you will become severely ill from any one mosquito bite are extremely small. Less than 1% of persons infected with West Nile virus will develop severe illness. Among those with severe illness due to West Nile virus, case-fatality rates range from 3% to 15% and are highest among the elderly.

Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which may circulate the virus in their blood for a few days. Infected mosquitoes can then transmit West Nile virus to humans and animals while biting to take blood. The virus is located in the mosquito's salivary glands. During blood feeding, the virus may be injected into the animal or human, where it may multiply, possibly causing illness.

West Nile encephalitis is NOT transmitted from person-to-person. For example, you cannot get West Nile virus from touching or kissing a person who has the disease, or from a health care worker who has treated someone with the disease.

There is no evidence that a person can get the virus from handling live or dead infected birds. However, persons should avoid bare-hand contact when handling *any* dead animals and use gloves or double plastic bags to place the carcass in a garbage can.

## **Mosquito Control**

Reducing the mosquito population around your home and property is one of the most effective ways to reduce mosquito bites and can be accomplished by eliminating standing water:

- ✓ Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- ✓ Remove all discarded tires on your property. Used tires are very significant mosquito breeding sites.
- ✓ Drill holes in the bottoms of recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- ✓ Make sure roof gutters drain properly, and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- ✓ Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- ✓ Change the water in birdbaths at least weekly.
- ✓ Clean vegetation and debris from edges of ponds.
- ✓ Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas, and hot tubs.
- ✓ Drain water from pool covers.
- ✓ Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.

## **Personal Protection During Outside Activity**

It is not necessary to limit any outdoor activities. However, you can and should try to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes.

- Because mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk, you may decide to limit outdoor activities at these hours.
- Make sure all windows and doors have screens, and that all screens are in good repair.
- If West Nile virus is found in your area:
  - ✓ Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.
  - ✓ Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET since mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing. Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. An effective repellent will contain 35% DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide). DEET in high concentrations (greater than 35%) provides no additional protection. Repellents may irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying repellent to the hands of children. Whenever you use an insecticide or insect repellent, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's DIRECTIONS FOR USE, as printed on the product.

**Personal Protection for Children and Pregnant Women**

Insect repellents often contain very strong chemicals (e.g., DEET, permethrin) and should be handled and applied carefully, especially in the case young children and pregnant women. Because young children's bodies are more sensitive to chemical exposures, and because some chemicals can affect fetuses, it is important to handle insect repellents carefully and avoid over-exposure by **carefully following label instructions** and the following guidelines:

- ✓ Keep repellents (and all chemicals) out of children's reach.
- ✓ Avoid using repellents on children less than two years old.
- ✓ Do not allow children to apply repellents themselves.
- ✓ Use only small amounts of repellent on children, and use repellents with 10 percent or less DEET by concentration.
- ✓ Do not apply repellents directly to children's skin; apply to the hands then on the child.
- ✓ Do not apply repellents near a child's eyes, nose, mouth, or hands to prevent accidental eye contact or ingestion.
- ✓ Avoid using DEET products on skin damaged by sunburn, cuts, rashes, or other skin conditions.
- ✓ Avoid breathing DEET products (especially sprays) by applying in well-ventilated rooms and not directly to the face. Apply to the hands then rub carefully on the face.
- ✓ Avoid prolonged use of DEET products and do not apply to skin that will be covered by clothing.
- ✓ Wash treated skin with soap and water upon returning indoors.

END